Concept of Non-Violence Movement of Gandhi

Dr. Karan
P.G. Department of History,
L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga-846004

Abstract:

Mahatma Gandhi came on this earth with his message of truth and non-violence (Ahimsa) at a time when the forces of aggression and violence reigned supreme on earth. Mahatma Gandhi taught us what Christ and Buddha had longed ago. He became an immortal spirit who guides us through the path of peace and non-violence. Gandhi was born in a middle class orthodox Hindu family of Gujarat, at Rajkot. Having received his early education in India, he went to London where he qualified himself as a barrister-at-law. Mahatma Gandhi was the exponent of the cult of Ahimsa or Non-violence. Like the Buddha, Christ and Chai Tanya he too believed in the ultimate violence. Like the Buddha, Christ and him, is madness which cannot sustain. 'ultimately force or violence will bow down before non-violence'. He had waged war not only against British imperialism; rather he declared war on all the forces of unrighteousness, untruth and injustice, all over the world. The idea of truth and non-violence is at the core Mahatma Gandhi's political thought. But he himself confesses that non-violence or 'ahimsa' was not his inborn virtue. He simply states: "In the journey searching for truth I fine ahimsa. I have only retrieved it, never discovered a new." Actually truth and ahimsa are closely integrated with his philosophy of life. He used to believe that ahimsa lies truth is God. So, he named his struggle 'Satyagraha'. The Satyagrahi will be the worshipper of non-violence which will be his life and duty.

Keywords: *Truth or Satyagraha, Non-Violence or Ahimsa, Characteristics of Non-Violence, Qualities and Characteristics of Satyagrahi, Identification of Truth and God*

Introduction:

According to Gandhi, "Non-Violence or Ahimsa was the heart of all religions. The Ahimsa is truth itself, its very soul and it's matures fruit. Truth and Ahimsa are the two sides of disc and are so intertwined that it is difficult to disentangle and separate them." He also said, 'Ahimsa does not simply mean non-killing. Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing old to the evil-doer…….in its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa I must love my enemy.' A man cannot practice Ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of Ahimsa calls forth the greatest courage. Diwakar said, "Gandhi's whole philosophy of life and action can be summed up in the following words: ceaseless, whole hearted endeavour to realize and experience, truth (the law of being and becoming), both spiritual and material, through non-violence which includes active love." Gandhi Challenged the age of violence, the 20th century with his weapon of non-violence. He wanted to normalize and moralize the Indian National Congress and by breathing into it the gospel of non-violence. His idea of non-violence was not an abstraction but a direction and line of action for the contemporary society and the Congress for a new mode of living. This culture of non-violence was demonstrated by his own example of simple and non-violent way of living. He found a new source of energy by splitting the atom of non-violence. There was no defines against his powerful weapon of attack.

The diction of non-violence as enunciated and practiced by Gandhi was dynamic and not static. It was radical in as much as it tolerated nothing less than unconditional acceptance of truth. It was meant to set free man form legal, political and moral restraints and to uplift and re-awaken his inner self. According to Nehru, "It is not non-resistance. It is non-violent resistance, which is very different thing, a positive and dynamic method of action. It was not meant for those who meekly accept the status quo. The very purpose for which it was designed was to create a ferment in society and thus to change existing conditions.' But at the same time, the exponent and propounded of this doctrine 3, Gandhi did not approve of asserting or winning one's freedom or recognizing one's authority or dignity by actions that

involve violence or hatred of the man in others, even if they may be your enemies. Self-Suffering is the third basic components of Satyagraha. According to Gandhi, 'Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.

Struggle and Non-Violence:

The path of non-violence was not a bed of roses in order in order to traverse it Gandhi had to face numerous hardships and from back. He had to struggle and experiment with truth which kept on illuminating his awareness and that of his followers particularly in the Congress. He passed through varied experiences and ordeals especially during the days of non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements. From the lower levels of consciousness, he reached the higher level of spiritual insight. In order to meet the challenge of social life he tapped the reserves of his spiritual energy. His life was a striving for transcendence and a voyage of the spirit. His gospel of non-violence revolved round all the wisdom of the East and the West. It would be worthwhile to analyse the Sanskrit word 'Ahimsa' which Gandhi used as synonym for the word 'non-violence. Ahimsa is composed of the negative prefix 'a' plus Himsa' meaning injury. Thus Ahimsa implies action based on the refusal to do harm. It is not just a negative nation but a positive attitude of country towards opponents and eagerness to understand their viewpoint. For Gandhi 'ahimsa' means an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in man. Etymologically, 'Himsa' is derived from 'Hins' meaning to injure, kill or destroy, 'Hins' was originally allied to the root 'man' who also means to slay, kill or damage, thus; Ahimsa' implies renunciation of the will to kill or to harm. Evil thought, lying, hatred and wishing ill to anybody hurt the gospel of Ahimsa. Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-door. However, at the same time a devotee of Ahimsa is not a passive spectator of evil deeds. The spirit of 'Ahimsa' resists the evil doer by disowning him actively. Not to say of approving of the evil deeds of the evil-door. Ahimsa does not tolerate the wrongs committed by him. It is a means of self-renewal which helps us in resisting injustice and in working or a new order of civilization. Ahimsa was the farthest removed from acquiescence in evil or from a false masquerade for one's weakness. It was demonstration of the resolute strength of the heroic soul which refuses to hurt anybody because every living creature is essentially spirit and fundamentally one with himself. It is the symbol of supreme moral and spiritual strength. Meticulous care for the right of the least among us is the sin qua none of non-violence. Verma said, in his book, 'Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya', "Ahimsa is not merely the negative act for refraining from doing offence, injure or harm to others, but really it represents the ancient law of positive self-sacrifice and constructive suffering." Gandhi considered truth and non-violence to be absolutely binding. He also said, "Ahimsa is virtually integrated with Truth of God…. The social application of Ahimsa is postulated upon the acceptance of spiritual metaphysics and the implied necessity of the growth of social charity.

Ahimsa or non-Violence:

Ahimsa or Non-Violence is the central concept of Gandhi's philosophy. According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or Non-Violence has a positive meaning also. In positive sense Non-Violence means 'love'. It means love towards all living creatures. The concept of non-violence is extended not only means to human love but love towards all sentient creatures of the world. That means one should bot love only human being but every living being in the world. When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well. He will not swear at him, and he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong-doer. Thus Non-Violence is complete innocence. Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Therefore, it embraces even sub-human life not

excluding noxious insects or beats. Non- Violence is,, therefore, in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love.

When the idea of Non-Violence in Gandhi's philosophy is analysed then a number of characteristics features stand out. In his book **'Social and Political Thought'** of Gandhi, J. Bandhopadhyay stated the following characteristic features of Gandhian Non-Violence.

1. Non-Violence in not the same as non-killing.
2. Non-Violence is not non-resistance born out of cowardice.
3. N0n-Violence implies several positive values. These values include love, active, resistance to injustice, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, truthfulness and brahmacharya.
4. Non-Violence implies bread-labour, which Gandhi derived from Ruskin and Tolstoy and ultimately form the Bible. Gandhi defined it as the 'Divine law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands.'
5. Non-Violence is a higher value than life. Gandhi regarded Non-Violence to be an ultimate value on three grounds. First, it is universally applicable. Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any. Thirdly, it is unlimited in its application.

Gandhi believed that non-violence in its absolute form is not realisable in practice. But relative Non-Violence can be realised in practice. Gandhi stated that Justas the perfect straight line as understood by Euclid cannot be drawn. Similarly perfect Non-Violence cannot be attained. But limited Non-Violence can be attained. Gandhi stated that the Divine Spark is present within man and we must constantly endeavour to keep alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded Non-Violence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognised the point that the practice of total Non-Violence in our life is not possible. Gandhi wrote, 'Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence.' This violence is directed against life.

According to Gandhi Non-Violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. He says, 'if we can manage to apply Non-Violence successfully at home, it will in its pure form become an irresistible power in the service of the state. Non-Violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. Non-Violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant.

The Gandhian concept of Non-Violence is dharma in action, and truth translated. It is not a static code of morality ready for adoption. It evolves and is in essence 'creativity morality', in the language of Bergson. Non-Violence is a dynamic and creative concept centred on truth. Truth, the supreme Ga3ndhian value, is the consummation of all that is spiritual in man. He regards violence as an evil in itself. He does not consider it to be neutral. According to Gandhi 'Ahimsa or Non-Violence' is the means; Truth is the end. They are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. They are the two sides of a coin. Ahimsa or Non-Violence should practice in the mental level. It means barring no ill-will against others. So, Ahimsa or Non-Violence is non-injury to others not only in the physical sense but of in the mental sense also. Hence the concept truth and non-violence according to Gandhi has a very wide application.

Gandhi is of opinion that 'Killing or Injury to life can be an act of violence only under certain conditions. These conditions are anger, pride, hatred, selfish consideration, bad intention and similar other consideration. Any injury to life done under these motives is 'Himsa'. Thus, the negative meaning of Ahimsa is 'non killing or non-injury,' but this presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice and the like. For example, when an animal which is going to die is suffering from intense pain in that case we may kill him to end his suffering or there may be cases when a woman has to safe dignity or owner against the criminal. In that case she can use violence in order to safe herself. So there are certain exceptions according to Gandhi to the law of violence. But for Gandhi, the positive aspects of Ahimsa are much more basic than its negative characters. Ahimsa is not merely refraining from causing

injures to creature; it stands for certain positive attitude towards other living beings that one must cultivate.

In its positive sense Gandhi said that Ahimsa represents one of the basic and essential qualities of mankind. That does not mean that violence does not have any place in life. In fact, even in preserving one's existence one has to commit Ahimsa of one kind or the other, and het Ahimsa is considered to be the law of our species. In fact, Ahimsa is nothing but Love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love one identifies himself with the object of his love, and this cannot be possible unless there is an effort to free mind from every such disposition that prevents the spontaneous outflow of love. Therefore, Ahimsa demands a sincere effort to free mind form feelings like anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealously, etc., because these create obstacle in the way of Love. According to Gandhi, love is the energy that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc.

Gandhi believed that without the practice of non-Violence Truth cannot be realised. Gandhi employed a curious argument to establish this point. Gandhi stated that God and Truth are identical. At the same time Gandhi accepted a pantheistic conception of God. He argued that God pervades all beings. All beings are united by God and the act of unification is made possible through love or Non-Violence. So Non-Violence is ultimately the cementing bond of the Universe that has its origin in God or Truth.

Satyagraha Movement: A Critical Appreciation

Why did Indians follow Gandhi? What made people defy colonial Government of India on the call of Gandhi? How did Indians revive their national pride and honour under the Gandhi-led Satyagraha? The following section of the essay deals with the strengths of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence keeping in mind the above three questions.

The overwhelming support and success Gandhi achieved was due to his unique Satyagraha movement. It was the versatile blend of the ancient Indian traditions and the western principles of rationality and humanism that his contemporaries like Tagore and predecessor like Tilak lacked. Although the later had philosophies of a comprehensive and practical methodology to revive the national honour and pride of India. Gandhi had both. The Satyagraha revolution then could not be blocked by any form of imperialism until it had achieved the complete independence for India.

First of all, Gandhi with the moral support (of traditional concepts of) ahimsa challenged the British imperialism on the one hand and Hindu orthodoxy on the other. The people of India listened to him because he was talking to them in the language and manner they understood fully. The masses mobilized on his call because they believed in the 'inner spirit' of Mahatma that could never desert them. Gandhi's greatest contribution was the bringing of people from various classes, creeds and religions into one community of Indian family. In Gandhi-led Satyagraha we find the peasants and landlords, the capitalists and the workers, the intellectual and illiterates, the westernized scholars and the traditional elites, the Hindus and the Muslims, the high caste Hindus and Untouchables, all working for each other's interests. By joining all the Indians in a common bond of citizenship he made them realize the value of their national identity. He infused in them a national spirit to fight unite against the inequalities. Having convinced them that they were nothing but Indians and that their grievances and enemy was the same, it was easy for him to direct the entire strength of a united nation against Great Britain to achieve national independence.

Secondly, Gandhi was well aware of the fact that Indians were not merely suppressed politically but their culture, their ethics, their moral and religious traits, in short the whole Indian civilization had been repressed by the modern materialist civilization. For the resurrection of national culture and heritage he had conducted a spiritual surgery of the body politic of India. Gandhi with his unique method of Civil Disobedience and Non-cooperation exposed to the masses a simple and national style of leadership. He did not play with words but his clothing, language, way of living, his thoughts all were deeply rooted in Indian culture and values. In order to impel his authority over the masses he toured their houses and

village. He listened to their problems; provided them the suggestions; redressed their sufferings and became their Mahatma. Wherever he went his Indian style of leadership stood in distinct contrast to that of the West and its culture. He loved his people; cared for them and in return they rejected British clothes and accepted khadi. Indians followed mahatma and started speaking national languages with great pride. Gandhi by dint of his moral charisma successfully inspired the whole generation of British India and attained for himself the status of an ancient and proud spirit of the Subcontinent. Had Gandhi not used the platform of Satyagraha movement, to explore the true national culture of India, he might have not been able to restore the national culture of India; he might have not been able to restore the national pride of the Indians. And once people of India revitalized their self-respect, the emancipation from any sort of exploitation and imperialism was inevitable.

Thirdly, the most pivotal service Satyagraha rendered for the independence of India was the complete eradication of the official terror of the British government. Gandhi openly described Satyagraha as the movement of brave and courageous people who knew how to die for a cause. His whole philosophy of non-violence appealed to his people to show their unassailable will, to place their 'complete soul against the tyranny of unjust empire'. When Indians fearlessly organized large-scale Satyagraha protests, refused to pay salt taxes, gave up their official jobs and titles, the authority of the mighty British Empire was challenged. It erased once and for all the fear of English imperialism from the minds of Indians. It had raised the commoners above the fear of the British Police and British Army, harsh secret service and impersonal bureaucracy, fear of prison and harsh laws, fear of feudal lords and wretched Indians into the bold and courageous nation of freedom fighters. The Indians now fully realized their moral and physical might. The impact of Satyagraha was enormously psychological as it snatched the Swaraj form the teeth of the British. Nehru explains this revolutionary change among the Indian in such words:

> And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air. He seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language……. Political freedom took new shape…. Fearlessness not merely bodily course but the absence of fear from the mind… The dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, Oppressing, strangling fear, fear of the army, the police….. It was against the pervading fear that Gandhi's voice raised; be not afraid…. So suddenly that black wall of fear was lifted form the people's shoulders.

This made them bold enough to demand their political rights. The chivalry the Indians had developed during the Satyagraha experience eventually led to the independence of India. Fourthly, if on the one hand Gandhi's strategy of non-violence empowered the Indians, on the other hand, it completely outwitted the colonial authority of Great Britain. It off-guarded them completely as the British imperialism had probably faced for the first time, since the American war of independence, a non-violence resistance. It had always put them on the horns of dilemma. Gandhi played with their nerves. He put the British government in such a perplexed situation from where they could neither retreat nor move ahead. If Satyagraha would have been merely the violent protest it would have been very easy for the protesters as terrorists. But because Satyagraha appealed to the human conscience, therefore, it made difficult for the government to treat them inhumanly. That was probably the reason that a white sergeant, in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, withdrew his arms with shock and horror, instead of hitting the Sikh protester, saying 'it is no use, you can't hit a bugger when he stands upto you like that.' He gave the Sikh a mock salute and walked off. In North-West Frontier Province some troops of army preferred to be court-martialled rather than kill the unarmed protesters of non-violence. The above instances of Satyagraha touched the moral instincts of the opponents and changed their heart. Moreover, whenever Gandhi staged Satyagraha, the national and international press always took great interest in such a unique non-violent protest for self-rule. Even the politicians of the British Parliament hailed Gandhi as a person 'who in living out his creed, personally….Succeeded in doing so more completely than anyone… since Christ. The consequence of non-violent movement was dynamic. Due to the pressure from all sides, government always delayed arresting the leadership in civil disobedience movements. For example it took

them two months after the inception of Salt Satyagraha to imprison Gandhi. This mid-period was always crucial for Gandhi and other leaders, in generating national and international support for the negation of harsh laws. It undermined the entire political structure of power. As acknowledged by Lord Birkenhead the Gandhi led-movement of non-cooperation used to fluster the entire machinery of British Government in India. At the advent of 1930 the prestige of British rule had shrunk so low that any individual or body could dare to deliver any British Governor an ultimatum. Gandhi's Satyagraha played with the psyche of the government, shook its very foundations, made it ambivalent and paralyzed the official machinery. The non-violent civil disobedience movements always aimed at pushing the government onto a dilemma that 'damned if you do, damned if you don't fix…., It used to exhaust the entire colonial structure and bring the government to a standstill. The movement could have never gained such a huge momentum of success, had it contained the element of violence and aggression.

Fifthly, Satyagraha broke the spell of orthodoxy that had been the stumbling block to the cultural social and political progress of India. The Indian society before Gandhi had never benefited from the skills and services of women. The reason was Hindu orthodox society that considered women inferior to men. Gandhi's Satyagraha movement brought thousands of women into action. It opened the door for the females to show their talent and contribute to the national progress of India. As observed by Madhu kosher in Gandhi on Women, the participation of higher and lower classes of women in the Satyagraha showed the non-violence of the protest. It also showed the splits in the orthodoxy and the rise of the social justice on the Indian soil. Ashoka's India might have never witnessed the iron lady like Indira Gandhi had Gandhi not made the women an equal partner in the Indian nationalist movement. Secondly, in the quest to united India, Gandhi rather completely trespassed the orthodoxy by putting efforts to abolish the socio-political evil of untouchability of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. These two problems were a severe threat to the unity and power of India. Therefore, he included both the issues on the national agenda of Satyagraha movement. But arguably Gandhi almost failed in these tasks, particularly in the latter. This research discussed both the issues under the section titled "limits and failures of Satyagraha".

Sixthly, Gandhi's Satyagraha invoked the new political culture in India, purely nationalist in nature. The Congress prior to Gandhi was the par4ty of cline classes that that functioned with the blessings of the British government. Its goal had never been a full-fledged freedom, but merely a liberal democratic polity within the British Raj. Its methods were short-sighted and limited to constitutional, liberal and moderated politics. Gandhi through the platform of Satyagraha transformed this flimsy and impotent voice of few classes to the powerful national organization of the kind India had never known. Gandhi-sponsored Satyagraha provided ample opportunities to people from various classes, creeds and sections of Indian society to get together and share their problems. From poor to rich, Muslims to Sikhs, atheists to orthodox and liberals to communists, all became part of this national forum. From poor to rich, Muslims to Sikhs, atheists to orthodox and liberals to communists, all became part of this national forum. People from different groups got together, discussed and shared their problems, disagreed with each other but respected the opponent's point of view. The members of this new Indian culture, instead of speaking different languages endued a national consensus that paved the way for the formation of national political language. This national culture has arguably immense impact on the rise and success of India as a secular counter. India is composed of homogenous identities, multicultural and various linguistic and religious sects. She could probably avoid the risks of a civil war and religious riots with the introduction of Satyagraha among the Indians. The members of this Indian family might have differences of opinion but the clash could never extend at the cost of country' national interests. This factor alone heaped in institutionalizing tolerance among the various Indian factions to strengthen the unity of the country. Even when partition became inevitable Gandhi tried his best to keep majority of Muslims in India so that the country could retain her homogeneity and secular character. Indians realized their decay only about 1920and that was the time when Gandhi launched his non-violent movement of reform. It infused a new

political programme; introduced a new phase into their national and individual problems and became the prophet of their regenerated nationhood.

Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence contributed enormously in transforming the politically disunited and morally declined people of India into an all-violence and methodology of Satyagraha suffers from serious limitations.

- *M.K Gandhi, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (hereafter, Collected Works), Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, pp. 10, 64; and hind Swarajya (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, Prakashan Mandir Publishing House) 1979, pp. 269-70. The letter is a photo static copy of Gandhi's original handwritten text in Gujarati.*
- *Raghavan lyer (ed.), The Moral and Political Writings of mahatma Gandhi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 2 vols., p.9.*
- *Gandhi, "The Doctrine of Sword', Young India, I August 1920.*
- *Encyclopaedia of Britannica (USA: the University of Chicago, 1985), pp.326-400.*
- *Joan V. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence (Los Angeles: university of California Press, 1965), hereafter Bondurant or Conquest of Violence, with numbers indication chapters and pages.*
- *Gandhi wrote in 'The Doctrine of Sword', Young India, 11 August 1920.*
- *Ibid.*
- *Raghavan Iyer (ed.), The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.1, pp.30-31.*
- *Ibid., pp99-100*
- *Gandhi from Yeravda Mandir : Ashram observances translated from the original Gujarati by Valji Govidji Desai (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, 1945), p.8.*
- *The Collected Works, Young India, 11 August 1920.*
- *For Gandhi's criticism of the modern civilization, see hind Swaraj (Ahmadabad; Navajivan,, 1938), and also The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.1, Part 4.*
- *The Collected works, young India, August 11, 1920*
- *Negley Farson in Eugene Lyons, We Cover the World (New York: 1937), p.141.*
- *Dolton, pp. 121-122*
- *Fanner Brockway, in Preface to Mahatma Gandhi, His Mission and Message (London: G.S. Darra, 129), p.6. Also see in New York, the Literary Digest in an editorial on the salt march titled "A Saint in Politics", wrote that Gandhi "is marching to the sea to further his campaign. The Sermon on the Mount is his book of etiquette."*